

CHAPTER ONE

THE FEDERAL VOTING ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

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1. The *Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA)*

The Director, Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP), in the Department of Defense, is responsible for administering the *Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA)* (42 USC Sec. 1973ff) on behalf of the Secretary of Defense who is the Presidential designee for the Federal functions of the law.

The *UOCAVA* allows the following U.S. citizens to vote absentee:

- Members of the U.S. Uniformed Services (on active duty) and merchant marine,
- Their family members, and
- U.S. citizens residing outside the U.S.

Members of the U.S. Uniformed Services or merchant marine and their family members may vote absentee while away from their place of voting residence, wherever stationed, inside or outside the United States.

U.S. citizens residing outside the United States and its territories may vote in the state or territory where they last resided immediately prior to departing the United States, even if many years have elapsed and the citizen maintains no residence in the state or territory and the intent to return to that state or territory may not be certain.

The *UOCAVA* covers over six million potential voters worldwide.

The *UOCAVA* requires states and territories to allow the groups listed above to register and vote absentee in elections for Federal offices. In addition, many states and territories have developed their own laws allowing citizens covered by the *UOCAVA* to register and vote absentee in state and local elections as well.

The *UOCAVA* requires each Federal department and agency with personnel covered by the *UOCAVA* to have a voting assistance program. The FVAP biennial Voting Action Plan and the Department of Defense Directive 1000.4 establish policy and guidelines for carrying out an effective voting assistance program (see Chapter 2).

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2. Helping U.S. Citizens to Vote

The goals of the FVAP and military and civilian VAOs worldwide is to:

- inform and educate U.S. citizens worldwide of their right to vote,
- foster voting participation,
- protect the integrity of, and enhance, the electoral process at the Federal, state and local levels.

In carrying out the responsibilities of the *UOCAVA*, the FVAP provides information and materials to *UOCAVA* citizens to help ensure their enfranchisement and promote understanding and participation in the democratic process.

Program activities range from the development of the universal Federal Post Card Application (FPCA or SF 76) (see Chapter 2, Section 5) which is accepted by all 55 U.S. states and territories and serves as simultaneous application for voter registration and/or an absentee ballot; to the production and worldwide distribution of print, broadcast and electronic voter education and information services; to developing and maintaining a working relationship with U.S. states, territories and other Federal government agencies to simplify the registration and absentee voting processes while maintaining its integrity.

3. The Federal Absentee Voting Forms

The FVAP prescribes the FPCA and the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB). See Chapter Two, Section 5 and 6 for information on the Federal forms.

4. The *Voting Assistance Guide*: The Principal Source for Voting Information

This *Voting Assistance Guide* is the official and primary source of *UOCAVA* absentee voting information. It is designed for use by both military and civilians providing assistance as well as individual *UOCAVA* citizens in registering and voting absentee. The *Guide* provides information about FVAP products and services and instructions for VAOs in the performance of their duties. State instructions and guidelines are organized alphabetically by state and territory in Chapter 3. The *Guide* is available in hardcopy, CD-ROM, and online (www.fvap.gov).

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5. Online and Email Access to FVAP

The FVAP website at www.fvap.gov provides voting related information and resources for *UOCAVA* citizens. The website is updated regularly and contains the latest information to help *UOCAVA* citizens participate in the democratic process.

The website also provides all of the FVAP's forms and informational materials in electronic format to include this *Voting Assistance Guide* (updated as required), current and back-issues of the *Voting Information News* and voting news releases as well as links to Federal government agencies and Congress, various U.S. citizen organizations

overseas, Secretaries of State, Directors of Elections, state and local government organizations and other pertinent sites containing election information.

Email access to the FVAP staff ombudsman Service (See below) is provided directly through vote@fvap.ncr.gov.

The World Wide Web and electronic mail (email) are the most effective and efficient ways to disseminate information and respond to inquiries as they allow citizens to be supported on a real-time basis regardless of their geographic location.

6. FVAP Also Provides

Absentee voters and Voting Assistance Officers (VAOs) can use the following resources when voting absentee:

- **Ombudsman Service** - puts VAOs, citizens and local election officials directly in touch with the FVAP via email, telephone or fax. Call toll-free in the U.S. at: **1-800-438-VOTE (8683)**, DSN (military) **425-1584** or Commercial **(703) 588-1584** and fax **(703) 696-1352**. International toll-free phone numbers are listed on the inside back cover and on the FVAP website at www.fvap.gov. The email address is vote@fvap.ncr.gov.
- **Electronic Transmission Service (ETS)** - faxes (and emails) election materials (FPCAs, blank ballots, voted ballots, other election materials) where allowed by state law, between the local election official and the absentee voter when conditions do not allow for timely receipt and return of these materials via the postal system. Because procedures vary from state-to-state, consult the state pages in Chapter 3 for details.

If electronic transmission is allowed by the state or territory, the FVAP recommends faxing using the following numbers: **(703) 693-5527; DSN (military) 223-5527 or 1-800-368-8683**. International toll-free fax numbers are listed on the inside back cover. If emailing is allowed, the citizen should email voting materials directly to the local election official. If the citizen is unable to access the local election official's email address, he or she may email the voting materials (along with the transmittal sheet provided in appendix B) via the Electronic Transmission Service to: ets@fvap.ncr.gov. If a citizen experiences technical problems when faxing or emailing the FPCA or ballot to the Electronic Transmission Service, citizens may contact the FVAP via the Ombudsman Service (see above).

After faxing or emailing, most states request that the citizen mail the original completed and signed FPCA or voted ballot to the local election official. See Electronic Transmission of Election Materials in Appendix B.

- **DoD Voting Information Center (VIC)** - an automated telephone system maintained and operated by the FVAP. It allows citizens to connect directly to the office of their U.S. Senator, U.S. Representative, State Governor and State Chief Election Official.

The VIC also serves as a means for military VAOs to communicate with their Service Voting Action Officer, and civilian VAOs to communicate with the Department of State Voting Action Officer.

The VIC can be reached toll-free in the U.S. at **1-800-438-VOTE (8683)**, **DSN (military) 425-1343**, **commercial (703) 588-1343** or by using the international toll-free numbers listed on the inside back cover and on the FVAP website at www.fvap.gov. To access the VIC, callers must use a touch-tone phone.

- **Voting News Releases** - time-sensitive periodic news releases that inform and educate VAOs and *UOCAVA* citizens about the latest critical information on absentee registration and voting procedures and on issues effecting their ability to register and vote. For example, if a state or territory makes a change to its procedures or election dates during the year, or a special election for a Federal office is called, a news release would be issued to alert citizens of these events.

Voting news releases are sent directly via email to VAOs. Releases are also available on the FVAP website at www.fvap.gov.

- **Voting Information News** - a monthly newsletter published by the FVAP which contains up-to-date information on elections, absentee registration and voting procedures, a "To Do" list for VAOs, and other voting related matters that may affect *UOCAVA* citizens. The newsletter is sent primarily to all civilian and military VAOs by email or regular mail. It is also available on the FVAP website at www.fvap.gov.
- **Training** - In-person training is available to VAOs. Contact FVAP for dates and locations. A training workshop presentation is available for VAOs at the FVAP's website at www.fvap.gov. There are two versions of the workshop. One focuses on the duties and responsibilities of VAOs in the Uniformed Services, while the other version is for VAOs at Embassies and Consulates as well as U.S. citizen organizations and corporations outside the United States.

The training highlights instructions for completing the forms, responsibilities of the VAO and the resources available to conduct a successful voting assistance program. An online E-Learning Training and Certification program is also available (see the FVAP website for additional information).

- **Election Dates and Motivational Posters** - The Election Dates poster, produced in even-numbered years, lists the dates for Federal office and state primaries, runoff elections and the general election. Best of all, this poster has a place at the bottom for the VAO's name, telephone number and email address. VAOs should display the poster prominently so individuals will know how to contact them.

To help promote voter awareness, the FVAP also provides motivational posters (in even-numbered years). These are posters that contain an inspirational message, usually obtained from the FVAP Slogan Contest, to stimulate interest in voting.

Military VAOs receive these posters through their normal distribution channels. Overseas citizens can obtain posters from Embassy and Consulate VAOs or order them directly from the FVAP.

- **Get Out the Vote Campaign.** - Produced by the FVAP, in cooperation with The Advertising Council, this campaign consists of motivational public service announcements encouraging citizens to register and vote. These are available in print, audio and video formats for use by state and local officials, as well as by VAOs in local media worldwide. Call the FVAP for details.

7. How to Contact the FVAP

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Department of Defense
1155 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301-1155

World Wide Web: www.fvap.gov
email: vote@fvap.ncr.gov

Commercial: (703)-588-1584
DSN (military): 425-1584
Fax: (703) 696-1352
DSN (military) Fax: 426-1352

1-800-438-VOTE (8683)
Fax: 1-800-368-8683
(from U.S., Canada, Guam, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands only)

International toll-free fax numbers
(See inside back cover or www.fvap.gov)

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